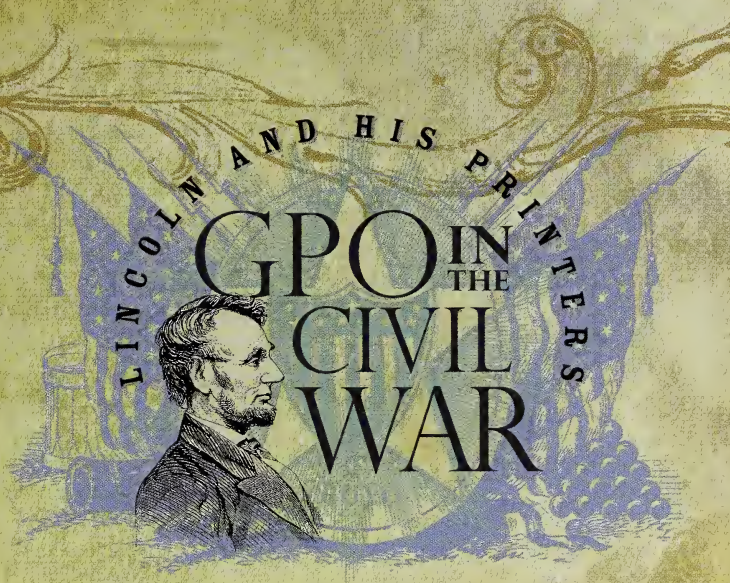
LINCOLN AND HIS PRINTERS

GPO IN THE CIVIL WAR

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

October 2013



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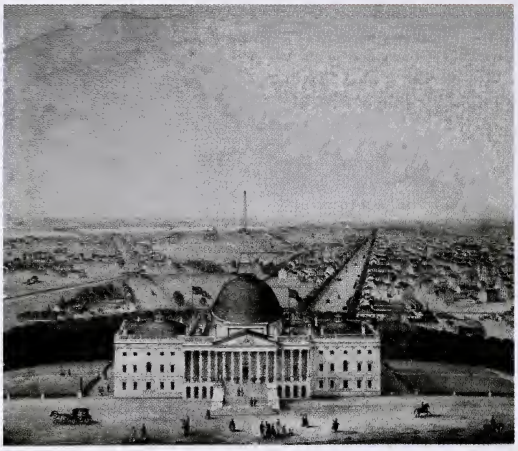
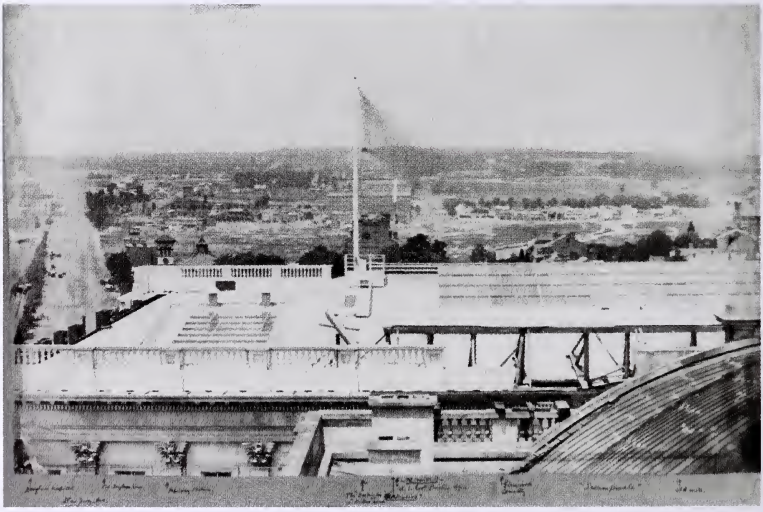
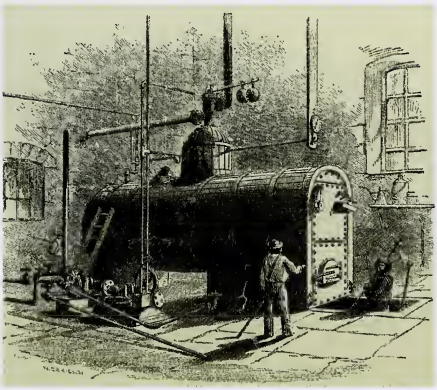


On the day that Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated President, March 4, 1861, the United States Government Printing Office opened its doors on H Street at North Capitol Street in Northwest Washington. The area was farmland gradually giving way to roads and buildings. Nearby Tiber Creek overflowed in wet weather, creating swamp and puddles, giving the neighborhood its nickname, "Swampoodle."

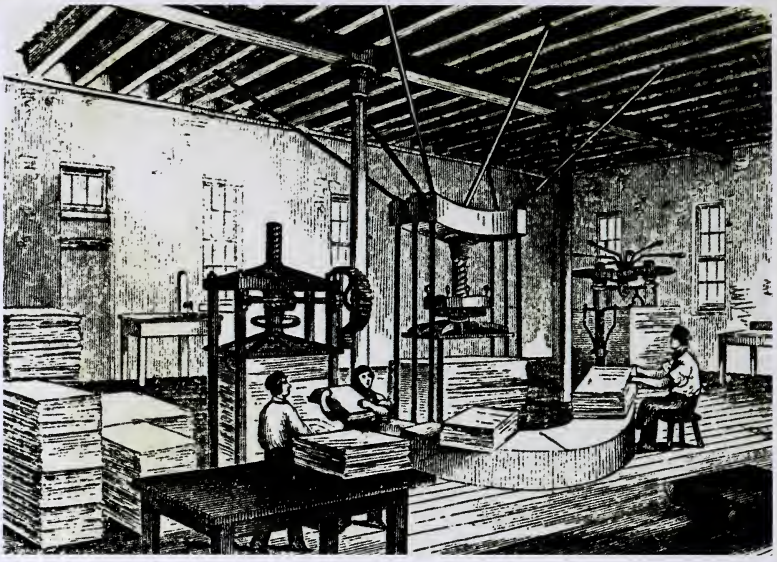


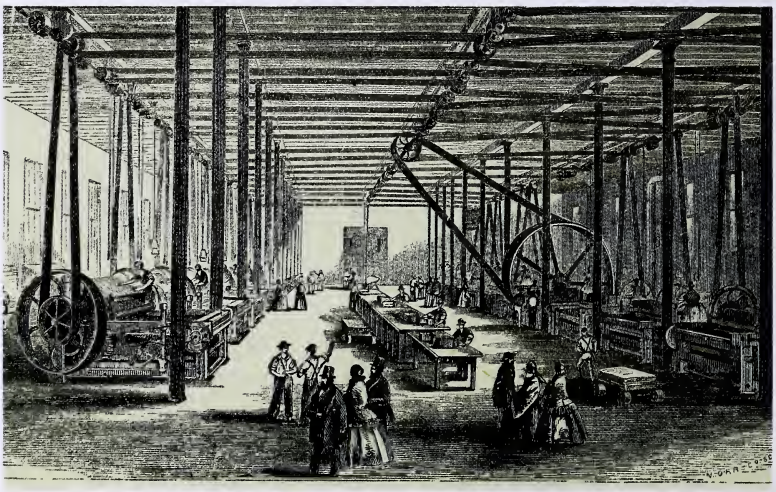
Swampoodle in 1861 was a seedy, chaotic shanty town that had grown up over the preceding decade as Irish immigrant laborers streamed into Washington. Its main drag was Jackson Alley, with a reputation for lawlessness and squalor almost unequalled in the city, a reputed "no-go" zone for the police. GPO formed the western boundary of Swampoodle, and drew many of its workers from its alleys and shanties.

The main building had been designed by Edward Clark, Architect of the Capitol, in 1856, and had opened for business as the printing establishment of Cornelius Wendell, printer for the Senate, in November, 1857. Wendell's was the largest and best equipped printing plant in Washington, and one of the largest in the country.



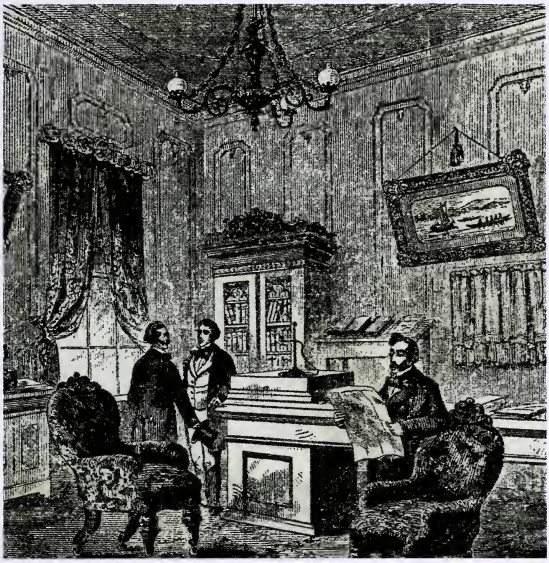
A visitor approaching GPO first caught sight of the tall chimney of the engine house where a 40-horsepower steam engine supplied heat and power for the office. Also on the site were a machine shop, stable, and warehouses where some 40,000 reams of paper came and went each year.

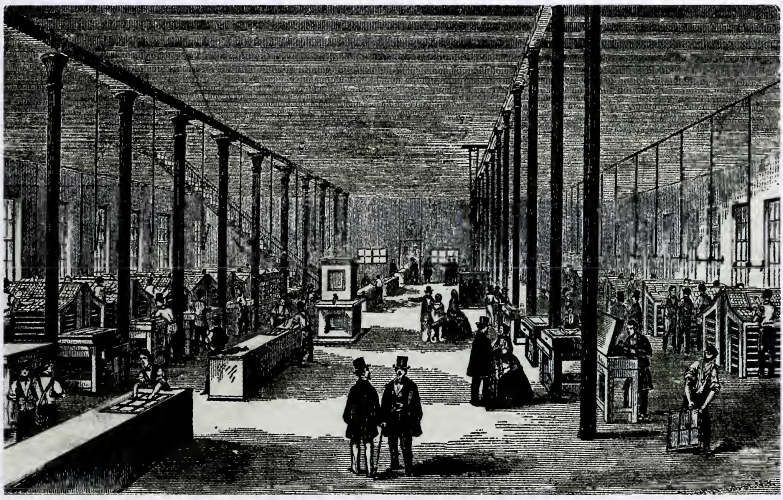




On the first floor was a wetting room, where paper was dampened prior to printing, and a huge hydraulic press for pressing the damp sheets. In the ink room, pigments, oil, and varnish were blended and ink rollers were stored. The press room commanded the greatest attention, with 23 Adams bed-and-platen presses and 3 Napier cylinder presses, all powered by steam, tossing off as many as 100,000 sheets in a single day.

On the second floor, the visitor found the office of the Superintendent of Public Printing. A walnut bookcase caught the eye with its examples of fine work such as the Annual Message of the President to Congress, Annual Report of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, and others. Adjoining this sanctum was the business office, and nearby the proofreading room, where copy was carefully scanned to eliminate errors.

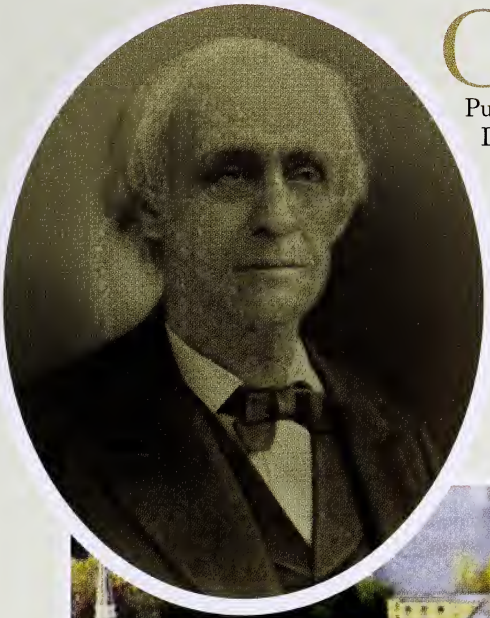




The bulk of the second floor was occupied by the composing room, a spacious hall with 60 windows for natural light and gas fixtures for evenings and work on cloudy days. There were 93 double stands of type and all the other tools of the trade: composing sticks, imposing stones, galleys, and many thousands of pounds of metal type.

The third floor was devoted to the bindery. In a large folding room 150 women were seated at tables where they rapidly folded printed sheets by hand. Elsewhere were two powerful cutting machines for trimming the edges of books, shears for cutting book board, gas burners for heating gilding tools, and many other tools. Adjoining this was the ruling room, where pale blue and red lines were applied to pages for the many blank record books used throughout the Government.

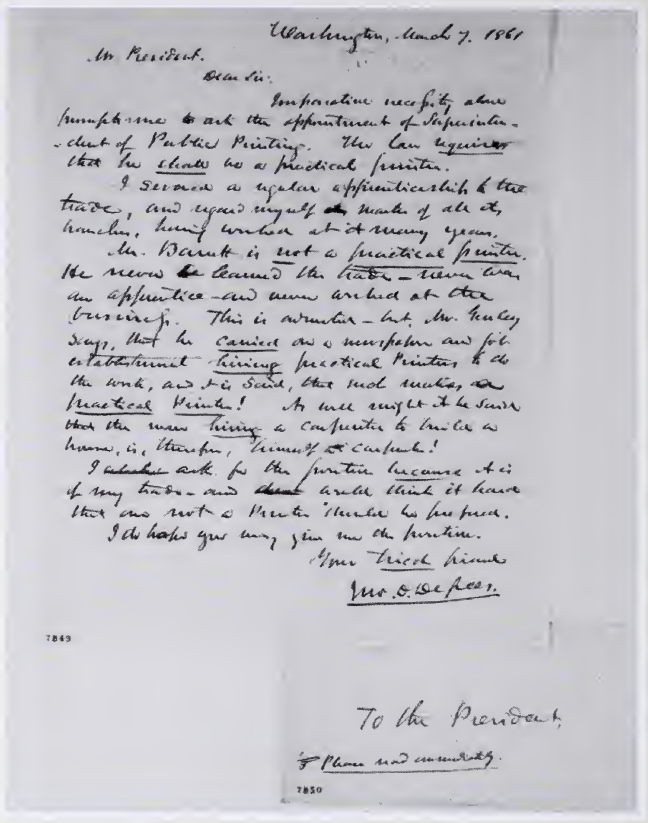
The fourth floor was a large store room for printed sheets and books waiting to be bound.



Over all of this presided the newly appointed Superintendent of Public Printing, John D. Defrees, described as, "a plainly dressed, quiet mannered man; a printer by trade." Defrees was, in fact, far more than a quiet, unassuming bureaucrat.

State of Indiana

Born on November 8, 1810, in Sparta, Tennessee, John Dougherty Defrees was the son of a farmer hostile to slavery. The family moved in 1818 to Piqua, Ohio, and in 1824 John was apprenticed to a printer. At 17 he began working as a journeyman printer in Xenia and Cincinnati, Ohio, and later in Louisville, Kentucky. At 21 he and his brother Joseph established a newspaper in South Bend, Indiana. Two years later he sold his interest in the paper, was admitted to the bar by the Indiana Supreme Court, and began to practice law. After being elected a state senator, he helped obtain a charter for a small academy on St. Mary's Lake that would grow into the University of Notre Dame.



Washington, March 7. 1861

Mr President.

Dear Sir.

Imperative necessity alone prompts me to ask the appointment of Superintendent of Public Printing. You can inquire that he should be a practical printer.

I served a regular apprenticeship to the trade, and regard myself as master of all its branches, having worked at it many years.

Mr. Barnes is not a practical printer. He never learned the trade — never was an apprentice — and never worked at the business. This is a mistake — but Mr. Forney says, that he carried on a newspaper and job establishment. Hiring practical Printers to do the work, and it is said, that such parties, are practical Printers! At most might it be said that the man hiring a Carpenter to build a house, is, therefore, himself a Carpenter!

I should ask for the position because it is of my trade — and should under think it honor that was not a Practical Printer should be promoted.

I do hope you may give me the position.

Your friend sincere

Jno. D. Defrees.

7849

To the President

Please read immediately.

7850

Defree's letter to Lincoln, seeking appointment as Superintendent of Public Printing

Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress

In 1854, Defrees' purchased the Indiana State Journal in Indianapolis and gained a reputation as the most caustic, brilliant, and fearless political editor in the west. He was active in the liberal wing of the Whig party, and later, the Republican party. Many Republicans, including Abraham Lincoln, sought his advice and political support.

In 1860, after decades of waste and abuse in contracting for printing, Congress opted for reform in the shape of its own printing establishment and created GPO by joint resolution. They purchased the Wendell plant in late 1860 for $135,000. Defrees, who had worked diligently on Lincoln's behalf in Indiana, wrote to the new President on March 7, 1861, asking to be appointed Superintendent of Public Printing. Lincoln appointed him on March 23.

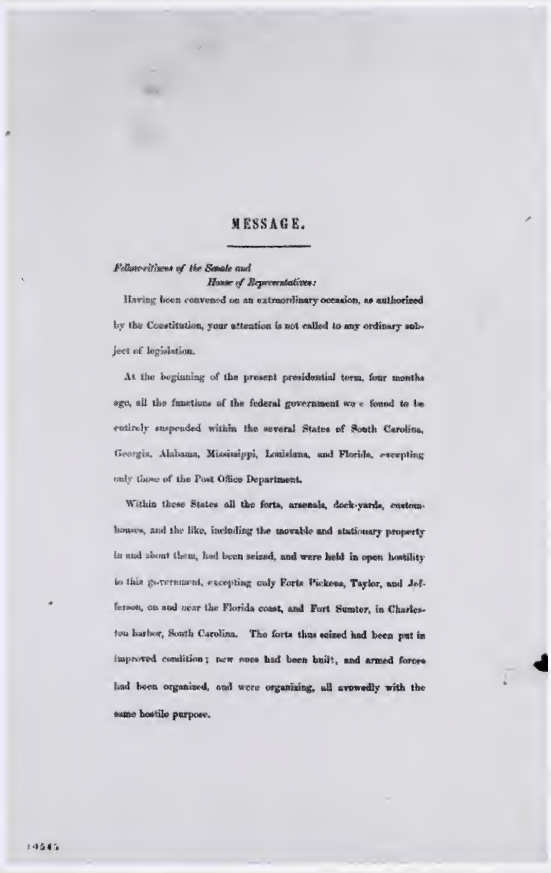
Defrees served through the Civil War years as GPO was launched on the mission Congress had directed. In his annual report for 1861, he noted savings of $60,000 for the first half–year alone, compared with charges under the previous system.

Defrees' stature as friend and advisor to Lincoln is clear. Lincoln's papers in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress contain many letters from Defrees offering advice, introducing people of significance, and conducting business.

One particular document illustrates the close relationship between Defrees, GPO, and Lincoln: the message to Congress that Lincoln delivered on July 4, 1861, detailing the executive actions taken in the early weeks of the Civil War and setting forth his views on the aims of the war.

While researching this message recently, Dr. Michelle Krowl, Manuscripts Specialist at the Library of Congress, looked at multiple drafts in longhand and set in type.

In an era before typewriters, copiers, or computers, it would have been a regular feature of GPO's work to set presidential documents in type and make proof copies to be returned to the President for his further revision.



MESSAGE.

Fellow-citizens of the Senate and House of Representatives:

Having been convened on an extraordinary occasion, as authorized by the Constitution, your attention is not called to any ordinary subject of legislation.

At the beginning of the present presidential term, four months ago, all the functions of the federal government were found to be entirely suspended within the several States of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida, excepting only those of the Post Office Department.

Within these States all the forts, arsenals, dock-yards, custom-houses, and the like, including the movable and stationary property in and about them, had been seized, and were held in open hostility to this government, excepting only Forts Pickens, Taylor, and Jefferson, on and near the Florida coast, and Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, South Carolina. The forts thus seized had been put in improved condition; new ones had been built, and armed forces had been organized, and were organizing, all avowedly with the same hostile purpose.

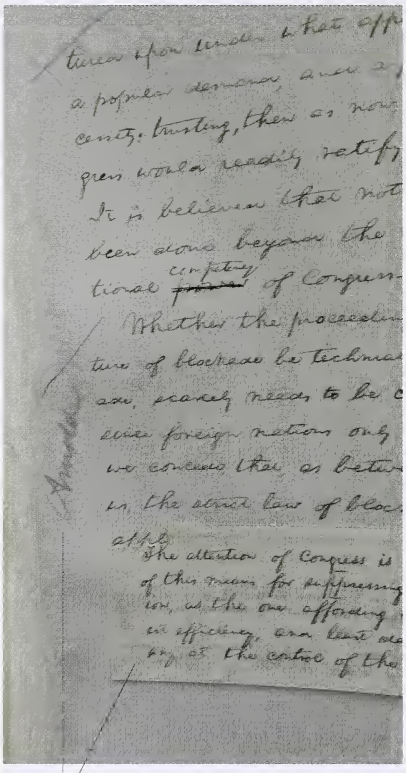
1954

Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress

A page from a printed draft of Lincoln's July 4, 1861 address to Congress.

Dr. Krowl noted names penciled in the margins of one particular draft and contacted GPO to inquire about the significance. By consulting the Superintendent's annual report for 1861, which lists the names of all 350 or so GPO employees, it was possible to verify that the names and marks indicate "takes" for GPO compositors. Then, as now, copy arriving at GPO for composing into type was sliced into pieces, called "takes," to be worked by multiple compositors simultaneously, especially critical because all type was set by hand. The head deskman in the Composing Division would mark and assign takes to the compositors, assuring that the composed galleys of type were subsequently assembled in the proper order for the production of a proof.

The July, 1861 message makes clear that Defrees' role was, from the outset of his term, more than an appointee held at arm's length. Subsequent drafts of the message show his role as advisor and editor.



Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Handwritten draft of the July 4, 1861, address showing pasted-in revisions, and a compositor's name in the margin.

Dr. Krowl relates that Lincoln was an inveterate note-maker, often scratching ideas or fragments of noble prose on scraps of paper or in "miscellaneous notebooks" for later use. He liked to "cut and paste" these scraps, and drafts of his writings frequently feature scraps of text set in type alongside scratched "miscellaneous" notes all pasted on a sheet with further text interpolated in longhand.

Historian Douglas Wilson, in his book *Lincoln's Sword*, relates that Defrees worked closely with Lincoln and "... regularly removed a large proportion of Lincoln's freely bestowed commas." In many cases Lincoln would accept these edits; in others he would not and would add even more commas. Wilson points out that, although grammatically unconventional, Lincoln's punctuation points to "his basic sense of language," which is spoken cadences. The commas provide notation for the pauses and breaks that would have sounded right to Lincoln's ear.

In this message, Lincoln and Defrees had a further disagreement over the use of the term "sugar-coated" to describe the spin put on the rebellion by secessionists. Defrees told the President the expression was "undignified" and proposed an alternative.

"Defrees," Lincoln is reported by biographer Francis B. Carpenter to have said, "the word expresses precisely my idea ... the time will never come in this country when the people won't know what 'sugar-coated' means!" The word stood and is part of the success of the message.

The final setting of type resulting from the manuscript in the Library's collection would have been used to produce sufficient copies for submission to the Clerk of the House and Secretary of the Senate.

LINCOLN'S VISIT

On October 24, 1863, Lincoln visited GPO. Newspaper reports tell us that he toured the plant and spoke briefly to the employees.

Defrees later reported that "A poor girl in the employment of the GPO had a brother impressed into the rebel service, [who] was taken prisoner by our forces. He desired to take the oath of allegiance, and to be liberated. She sought an interview with the President who wrote a note asking me to inquire into the facts, which I did, and the young man was liberated on the President's order."

EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

In a long history of important documents, the single document with perhaps the greatest significance was the Emancipation Proclamation.

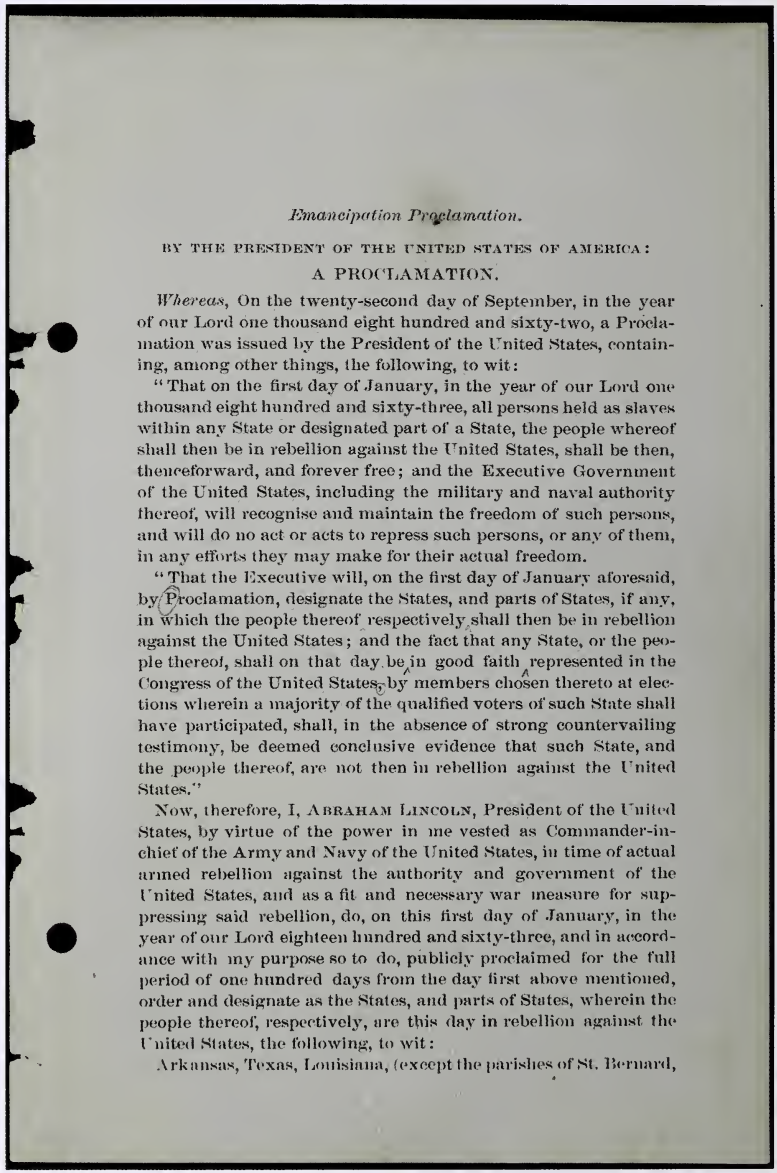
Lincoln's "preliminary" proclamation was issued on September 22, 1862, as a general order of the War Department. Historian John Hope Franklin describes the scene:

"First reading of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln" by Francis Bicknell Carpenter.

U.S. Senate

"The historic meeting of the Cabinet was hardly over on September 22, 1862, before the printing and distribution of the preliminary Proclamation had begun. That afternoon and evening the employees of the Government Printing Office worked late and prepared copies for distribution to the press and government agencies. [Secretary of State] Seward ... ordered copies that were to go ... to the numerous diplomatic posts of the United States in foreign countries."

The preliminary Proclamation was issued in "... general orders format, as an order of the Commander-in-Chief to the armed forces. Because he had direct control over the Army, the President thus made it unnecessary to go through Congress to activate the Proclamation."



Emancipation Proclamation.

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

A PROCLAMATION.

Whereas, On the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a Proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

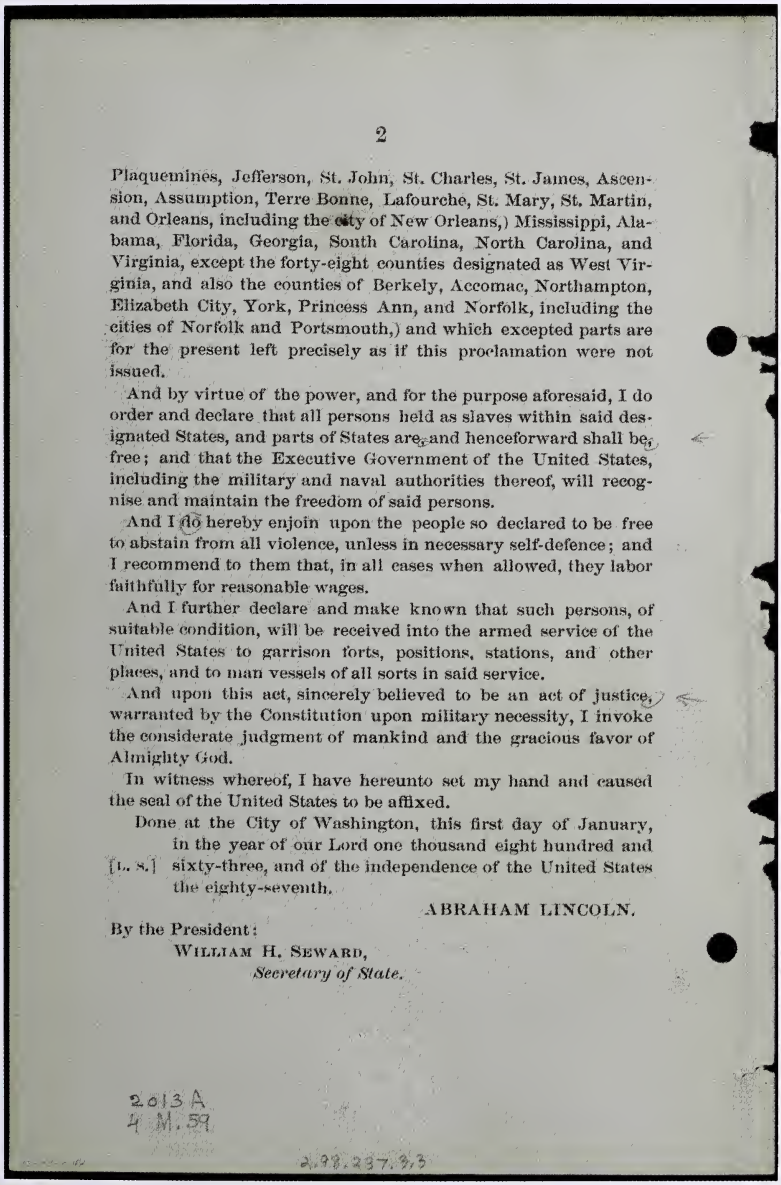
"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognise and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by Proclamation, designate the States, and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof respectively shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be in good faith represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore, I, ABRAHAM LINCOLN, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do, publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States, and parts of States, wherein the people thereof, respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the parishes of St. Bernard,

The final Proclamation, issued January 3, 1863, bore minor modifications. In December, 1862, perhaps in the course of preparing the final version, Superintendent Defrees wrote to Lincoln's secretary John G. Nicolay, "Only a few events stand out prominently on the page of the history of each century... The proposed proclamation of the President will be that one of this century."



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Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terre Bonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the city of New Orleans,) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkely, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth,) and which excepted parts are for the present left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States are, and henceforward shall be, free; and that the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognise and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I do hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known that such persons, of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and [L. S.] sixty-three, and of the independence of the United States the eighty-seventh.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

By the President:

WILLIAM H. SEWARD,
Secretary of State.

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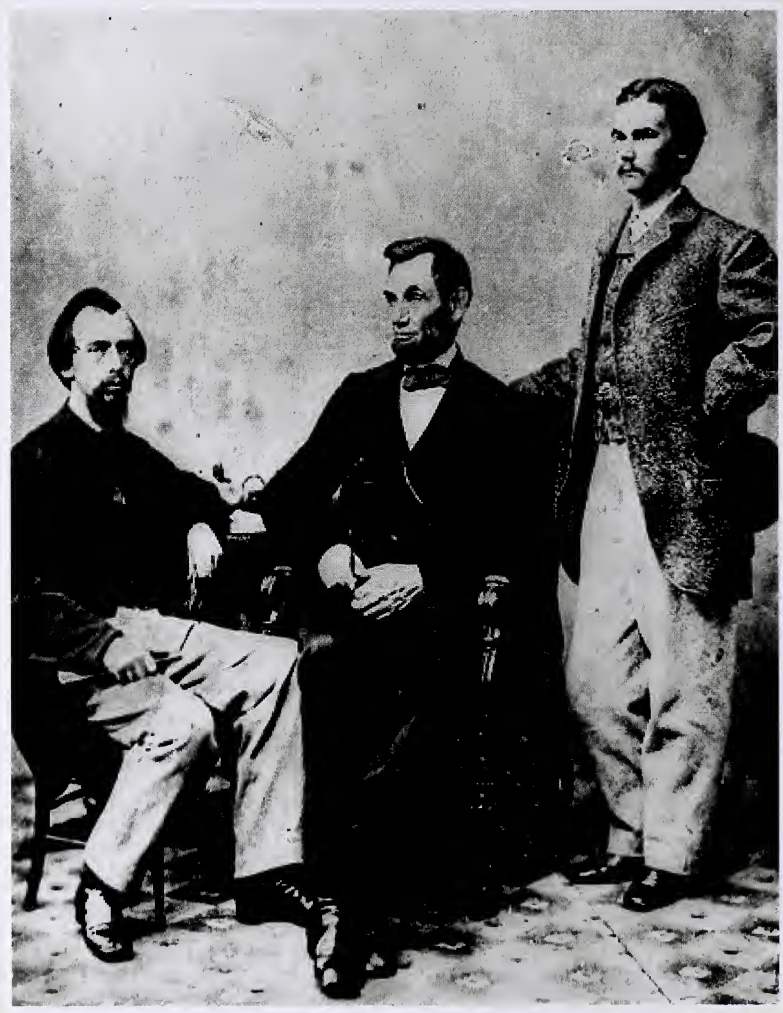
Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress

A year later, Defreees advised Lincoln further, "Now why not send a message to Congress recommending the passage of a joint resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution forever prohibiting slavery in the States and territories?" Lincoln, through Nicolay, promptly replied, "Our own friends have this under consideration now, and will do as much without a resolution as with it."



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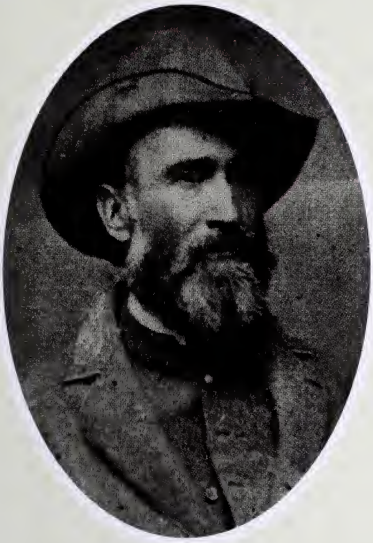
Lincoln and his secretaries, Nicolay and Hay, by Alexander Gardner, 1863



Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Gen. Jubal Early

As the war dragged on, Washington came under threat of Confederate attack by the forces of Gen. Jubal Early. Throughout much of the war GPO printers and binders had formed two militia companies, company F and company G, in the so-called "Interior Department Regiment." Hours were set aside for drill and instruction and GPO was guarded at night.

On July 11, 1864, Early's forces, approaching from the northwest, came within 5 miles of the Capitol and were engaged by Union forces at Fort Stevens, near the present-day Walter Reed Medical Center.

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

Union troops at Fort Stevens in northwest Washington.

Company F, the printers, marched to defensive positions across the Anacostia River, near Fort Stanton and St. Elizabeth's Hospital. When reinforcements from General Grant's forces at Petersburg, Virginia, arrived a day later and helped repulse the attack, the GPO militiamen returned to their work in Swampoodle.

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress

The bridge over the Anacostia near the Washington Navy Yard, across which Company F marched.

After the war, GPO continued its growth and expansion. The original building was enlarged in 1865, 1871, and 1879. The number of employees grew steadily, as did the production of public documents.

After Lincoln's assassination in 1865, President Andrew Johnson appointed a new Superintendent of Public Printing, the man who built the building purchased by Congress for GPO in 1860, Cornelius Wendell. He served only five months before the Senate replaced him with his predecessor, John Defrees, who then served until 1869.

The neighborhood surrounding GPO developed too, with many new houses and businesses in the years immediately after the war. John E. Hicks wrote: "The 'glory' that had been Swampoodle was flown, its most noted thoroughfare, Cabbage Alley, had vanished, and the Tiber, the stream that once overflowed the early Irish of Swampoodle, was controlled. The once turbulent section had become a quiet residential district where the clock on St. Aloysius tolled out the time of day ..."

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The text for this booklet is based on articles originally written for the GPO newsletter *Typeline* in 1983-84, by GPO Agency Historian Daniel MacGilvray (retired).

Photographs are from the GPO photograph collection, unless otherwise credited.

The exhibit *Lincoln and His Printers: GPO in the Civil War* opened in October, 2013. The invaluable assistance of the following individuals and institutions made the exhibit possible:

Mr. John DeFerrari
Dr. Michelle Krowl
Mr. Marc Leepson
Ms. Tambra Johnson Reap
The Interpretive Programs Office of the Library of Congress
The Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress

COLOPHON

The text of *Lincoln and His Printers: GPO in the Civil War* is set in Adobe™ Caslon Pro, a digital version of a classic typeface which bears the name of its designer, William Caslon (1692-1766). In the early 18th century, most English printers were using type cast in Holland. Caslon's type, although clearly modeled on Dutch forms, is regarded as the first significant embodiment of English typography. Most of the type brought to Colonial America was "Old Style" or Caslon, and the first printing of the *Declaration of Independence* was set in it by John Dunlap of Philadelphia.

By the time of GPO's founding in 1861, most book printing was being set in Caslon, and the first large purchases of type for the growing GPO were for large quantities of "Old Style." This reliance on Calson, "almost superstitious" in the words of typographic scholar Beatrice Warde, continued until the era of hot metal typesetting began in the early 20th century. GPO's largest single job ever, the massive 128-volume *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, printed between 1880 and 1900, was set in Caslon.

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